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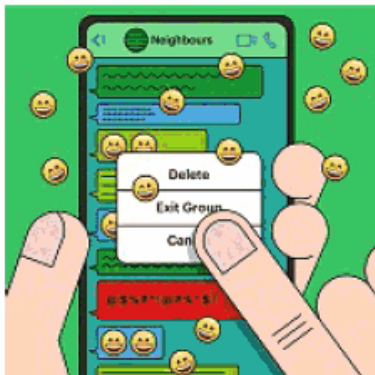
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LEWIS KHAN

'To be honest the Olympics was coming round really, really quick'

Gold medal-winning gymnast Max Whitlock, p20



'It needed to be dealt with. But was it really my job to explain why this joke was offensive?'

Orla Ryan on Irish stereotypes, p28



'Lamb shoulder requires very little of the cook. It's almost impossible to ruin'

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SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

What Democrats can do to topple Trump



If the Democrats get their campaign against Donald Trump wrong, they will never be forgiven. If they get it right, it will become a template for progressives everywhere. Here are some lessons they can learn, including from Trump's own 2016 campaign:

• **Speak for the essential worker.** In 2016, Trump presented himself as protector of the white factory worker, and Hillary Clinton as the embodiment of the academic, political and financial elites. But

the pandemic has created a new working-class hero. The underpaid essential worker – such as a nurse, cashier or garbage collector – is the perfect figurehead for the progressive agenda of better healthcare, public services and pay. Let Trump embody the rapacious elite this time.

Thomas Coombes, founder of the consultancy Hope-based Comms, draws a broader lesson for progressives: “Instead of inducing pity for victims, offer people an opportunity to side with everyday heroes.”

• **Stand for togetherness.** Joe Biden plans to run as an American against a partisan. He needs to signal to Trump's supporters that he's keeping a place for them in his America, just as Nelson Mandela signalled that to white people in South Africa. Clinton didn't do this in 2016. She later said that the comment she regretted most was: “We're going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business.” Admittedly, it was taken out of context but it was disastrous because she seemed to be depicting a future without Trump's core voters in it.

Togetherness means white and black together. After Trump's election, Anat Shenker-Orsorio, an expert on progressive communications, and Berkeley law professor Ian Haney López tested different messages on race in focus groups and polls. Their findings were clear: what works best is the “race-class message”, which portrays people of all colours united against a bad power structure. A typical “race-class” message starts: “No matter where we come from or what our colour, most of us work hard for our families. But today, certain politicians and their greedy lobbyists hurt everyone by handing kickbacks to the rich.”

The race-class message polled much better than the “racial justice” message, which emphasises how white racism harms black people. Talk of racial justice put white people in the focus groups on the defensive. Many people of colour disliked it too. They thought it deprived them of agency and doubted it would change anything.

These studies were done before the Black Lives Matter movement gained majority support among white people after George Floyd's killing. But many white people only began supporting the movement after seeing on TV and social media that other white people had joined it. In their minds, they recast Black Lives Matter from a black movement into a movement of ordinary people of all colours against a bad power structure.

• **Lead with values, not policies.** Few voters still believe candidates' policy promises – especially in the US, where modern presidents struggle to get even piffling laws through Congress. Stacey Abrams, one of Biden's possible running mates, told the *Wilderness* podcast that people who were already sceptical of voting would switch off if you propose what sounds like a wish list. “They are going to presume that you are either lying or that you are naive.” Something like that happened to Jeremy Corbyn in December's UK general election.

Instead of promising policies, promise values. Values talk is more credible, it sounds human and it explains your policies. Shenker-Orsorio

‘In this year's election, the Democrats have a rare opportunity to offer both modernisation and nostalgia’

cites some persuasive values statements: “Love is love” for gay marriage, and “People who work for a living ought to earn a living.”

• **This time, Democrats can own the Golden Age.** The author Masha Gessen, channelling social psychologist Erich Fromm, says that in times of anxiety, people look for a “Magic Helper” to transport them to a simpler past. Trump was elected as the Magic Helper who would restore America's lost greatness. Instead he has only intensified American anxiety. Now Biden can be the Magic Helper. The candidate is always the message and though Biden's age carries disadvantages, it does allow him to incarnate a happier, more civil past. The Democrats this time have a rare opportunity to offer both modernisation and nostalgia.

• **Run on climate change and nature.** Democrats should own these issues. In a Climate Nexus poll for *The Atlantic* magazine in February, two-thirds of respondents said they were very or somewhat worried about climate change. Trump's denialism alienates swing voters. Protecting nature has also become a priority among voters from France to New Zealand. It's something candidates can promise more credibly than stopping climate change, and it often involves identical policies, such as cutting factory emissions.

• **Choose your critique of Trump.** With so many possible lines of attack, it's easy to get distracted. Accusing him of collusion with Russia has proved too complex and distant from most voters' lives. Instead, Barack Obama's former chief strategist David Axelrod advises Democrats to “link Trump's character and style to the chaos that reigns around him”. Democrats should deny Trump the culture war he craves. In a depression and a pandemic, they must stick to their strongest issues: uplifting ordinary people of all colours, and giving them healthcare. **FT**

simon.kuper@ft.com @KuperSimon



INVENTORY ELLIE GOULDING
SINGER AND SONGWRITER

**‘I wrote a diary
when I was a kid.
I would do
anything to get
my hands on it’**

Ellie Goulding, 33, released her debut album *Lights* in 2010. It charted at number one and sold more than 1.4 million copies. Since then she has sold more than 15 million albums and 102 million singles, and won two Brit awards.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

To be an actor.

Private school or state school? University or straight into work?

Lady Hawkins’ High School, a state school in Kington on the border between Wales and England. I was a combination of hard-working and naughty – I worked hard but liked to talk. I had a gap year and decided to do an AS-level in film. At the same time, I took on jobs in a pub, a shop, a theatre. I wrote to the University of Kent and said, “I can’t afford to come and visit, but please let me in”, so the first time I set foot on campus was when I started there.

Who was or still is your mentor?

I don’t know about mentorship – I give myself credit for figuring things out for myself. Cassandra Gracey, one of my good friends, is the closest person to someone I would call a mentor. We used to work together; she now works for a record label. She has incredible positivity – nothing is impossible for her. She is especially a champion of the women around her. She taught me to get through the negative, low moments.

How physically fit are you?

Very. I spent lots of time running as a teenager and in my early twenties – 10k a day at least, and that gave me very good heart rate variability. I do everything from high-intensity interval training to yoga to simply walking.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

For me, it was absolutely an equal dose of both. I know so many fantastically talented musicians and writers who haven’t quite got there because the ambition isn’t there.

How politically committed are you?

Very. I vote and I encourage others to vote. I don’t tell people how to vote, but I will talk about climate change, about plastic pollution, about equality, about homelessness – and then say “vote wisely”.

What’s your biggest extravagance?

I bought a diamond ring and announced that I would be married to myself. Then about four months

later I got engaged! It was a purchase I somewhat regretted. **What would you like to own that you don’t currently possess?** A bike.

In what place are you happiest?

Back in Wales, where I spent most of my childhood running around Elan Valley. It’s in Rhayader, in the middle of Wales, with a series of big, grand dams – it’s so beautiful. That’s my peaceful place. All you can hear is water and sheep.

What ambitions do you still have?

When I think back to my early songwriting days, I loved the idea of people listening to my music and feeling better. I want to do as much as I can in spreading compassion and empathy.

What drives you on?

Knowing that there is so much more to do, so much more to learn, so many more people to meet, so many more songs to write.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

Being able to have a career that I am so passionate about. I am so grateful.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

I don’t like it when people don’t listen properly.

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

I think she would be quite impressed. Quite proud, maybe. And maybe she would want to kick me up the arse a bit. She had so many things she wanted to do. I definitely feel I’ve lost a fraction of my ambition.

Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?

I wrote a diary when I was a kid. I would do anything to get my hands on it.

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

It has to be the climate emergency. I can’t think of anything more important than saving the planet.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

Because I’m so aware of my own body and mortality I find it hard to think about an afterlife.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

A good seven. I’d love to get it up to a 10 at some point, but artists are never quite content. **FT**

Interview by Hester Lacey.

“*Brightest Blue*”, Ellie Goulding’s fourth studio album, is out on July 17



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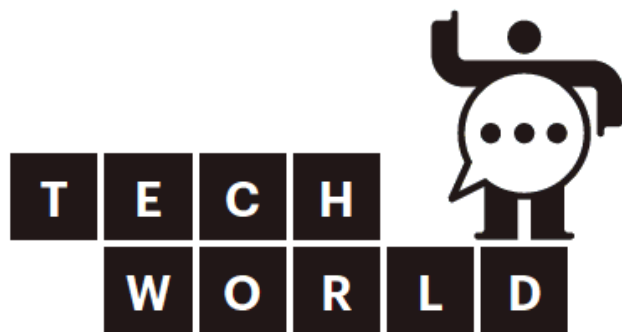
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BY YUAN YANG IN BEIJING

Time for tech companies to Zoom out of Hong Kong?

There was a time when tech companies could not afford to miss out on China. They wanted to tap its vast market of mobile users and its cheap supply of well-educated developers. But after a decade in which Google, Twitter and Facebook have tried and failed to take root, it has become difficult terrain.

Last week, Hong Kong passed a wide-reaching national security law, bringing its political climate much closer to Beijing's. As a result, tech companies are already asking themselves whether they have more to lose than gain by being in China, which, more than ever before, includes Hong Kong.

In the face of this offensive, the US giants have announced a temporary ceasefire. Facebook, Twitter, Google, Zoom and Microsoft's LinkedIn say they will pause processing requests from Hong Kong government agencies while they review the new law. Apple is the only one of the group that has not yet taken a stance. The company, which also has the most business in China, is still "assessing" what to do next.

But a pause is not a solution: it is a play for time. The companies are waiting to see how the world, particularly the US government, will react to the new laws, which force companies to aid national security investigations by freezing accounts, handing over private data and/or taking down posts. If the pause lasts too long, the companies, which all have offices in Hong Kong, could themselves be accused of crimes against national security.

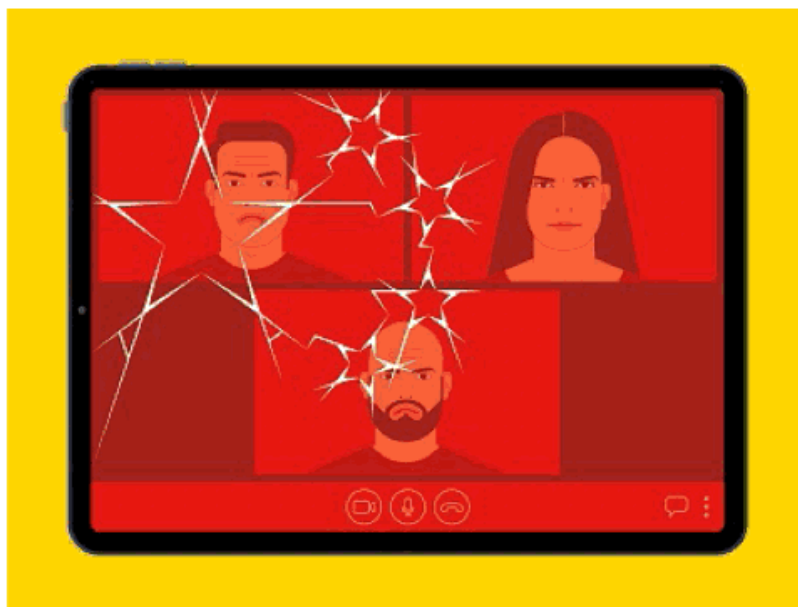


ILLUSTRATION BY PATE

These companies can look to the mainland to see the political pitfalls that lie ahead. The experience of the video-calling platform Zoom, which has developers in China, exemplifies some of the problems. Zoom has promised to upgrade its technology to allow it to boot out individual users based in China from group video meetings at the government's request (before that, it could only end the entire meeting). In June, the company suspended the accounts of several US-based Chinese-American activists who were holding online commemorations of the massacre of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square.

Zoom's experience could become the norm. American companies will find it hard to please both their stakeholders

'American companies will find it hard to please both their stakeholders at home and the increasingly authoritarian rulers in Beijing and Hong Kong'

at home and the increasingly authoritarian rulers in Beijing and Hong Kong. Zoom's compliance with Beijing's requests for censorship saw it rightly criticised by US lawmakers – although investors have continued buying the stock, one of the winners of the global lockdown. The company has promised a security overhaul and a transparency report.

Zoom is merely the most recent tech upstart to face the China dilemma. The fact that its founder, Eric Yuan, is a Chinese-American immigrant, has awoken the racism of some commentators, amid a growing "yellow peril" scare in the US. But the mostly white Silicon Valley establishment has been wrestling with moral dilemmas in China for decades.

In the past few years, Apple has taken down anti-surveillance VPN apps, songs associated with the pro-democracy movement and a mapping app used by Hong Kong protesters. But as far back as 2005, Yahoo shared a journalist's email data with Beijing, leading to his imprisonment. Later that year, Microsoft deleted an activist's blog and, years before that, Cisco helped build the Great Firewall of internet controls.

Decades ago, US companies argued they had a better chance of improving the situation in China by being there. That no longer flies. Instead, companies say that they have to comply with the country's laws and regulations.

But let's take tech companies, and China's laws, at face value. Laws exist partly to ensure transparency. Platforms owe it to their users to be as transparent as possible. So which laws are they implementing? What evidence is there that users broke the law? Did they try to negotiate with the Chinese government? (Zoom did push back on one request, showing there is room for manoeuvre.)

These are the questions we will have to ask companies in both mainland China and Hong Kong. One business that demonstrates more transparency than most is Microsoft's GitHub, the code-sharing platform that is unblocked in China, and can be used to host almost anything. GitHub posts the full take-down notices it receives from Chinese ministries. This creates a paper trail – in itself, an important act in a state that operates by destroying information. **FT**

Yuan Yang is the FT's deputy Beijing bureau chief

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Another 'clear-out', another fallout...

Of all the domestic divides, there are few more fierce than the emotional Grand Canyon that exists between a hoarder and a declutterer. Alas, my wife and I are those star-crossed home organisers and as the pandemic has forced even the spawn into fits of tidying, this fundamental tension is placing an extra burden on an increasingly ill-tempered household.

The immediate issue concerns the boy, who is making use of his enforced captivity by clearing out his room in readiness for a new bed and other furniture. This is a good plan for a 20-year-old. The high-sleeper bed with step ladder made the most of his medium-sized room but it ceases to impress once you turn 12. He has been demanding a new bed for some time – and with increased vehemence – on each arrival home from college. But since we made it contingent on a clear-out, which he never felt to be the optimal use of his time, he has been stuck with the old one for far longer than necessary. Now, however, the lockdown has done the trick and a new berth arrives within a week.

Sadly, this means a major reorganisation – far more major, in fact, than seems likely to materialise given the deadline – but the boy has taken to the task of clearing out the room with something almost approaching energy. At the time of writing, a full two cupboard shelves have been emptied and three large bin bags are breaking up the tedious right angles of our hallway. Why, you might ask, are they not at the tip, in the bin or at a charity shop?

And this is where the family hoarder comes in. My wife is someone who can derive sentimental value from almost anything. No Proustian madeines are needed to conjure up memories: any old piece of tat will do the job. The spawn have likewise been



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

encouraged to follow her belief in the value of every old birthday card, whereas other children rightly discard them the second they have observed the niceties of glancing at them before opening the present. Somewhere, there is a jar filled with milk teeth.

The reason vast quantities of childhood toys have sat unattended in the boy's room for over a decade is because it was easier to chuck them in a cupboard than have the argument which always ran, "You can't throw away old..." or "Surely you'd want to give that to your own children one day?"

This wouldn't matter except that if he won't keep them, it seems we might. Suddenly, bags of stuffed toys – untouched since primary school – are appearing in our bedroom, allegedly for our nieces, but who are we kidding here? A Pink Panther, several Mickey Mice and a raft of other unwanted are among the tragic tide of displaced plushies seeking refuge in a corner of our room. So steady is the stream of discarded toys that I'm beginning to see the merits of Priti Patel's points system.

Now, I don't want to oversell my own commitment to neatness. I'm not in the Marie Kondo category, though I'm sure I've got her book lying around somewhere. But I

have, over the years, managed to harden my heart against unwanted stuff. Sentimental value seems to be something one ought to be able to reduce to a very few, ideally quite small, items. A favourite teddy, a toy with a particular resonance.

They are kept less because they are still valued than because the act of throwing them out seems too painful. Sometimes you hang on to things because the spawn cannot be trusted to be sentimental enough to do it themselves. We all regret odd toys we didn't care enough about to save, though mainly when we see them up for auction for four-figure sums.

A number of these items also appear to mean more to my wife than they ever did to the boy. His dribble-flecked favourites are long gone. It's the ones we liked that seem to survive. Anyway, this has made life considerably easier for him in his clear-out. All he has to do is stuff everything in a bin bag and, miraculously, it reappears in another room.

With each clear-out, the house seems to get more cluttered. Soon we are going to have to drive the children out of their home just to make room for all their old stuff.

robert.shrimsley@ft.com

@robertshrimsley



Re "I want my Europe back: Simon Kuper on a summer without travel" (July 4/5). My grandmother, a first-generation immigrant to the US, told me to collect passports, as many as possible. "You never know when a country will turn against you," she said, "so make sure there is somewhere else that has to take you."

Glaucos via FT.com



@alemannoEU July 2
"I want my Europe back": an emotional tour de force of cross-border travel, which – contrary to conventional wisdom – has never been the exclusive remit of elites

Thanks to Lloyd Harry-Davis for "Home used to be 'wherever my family is'" (July 4/5). I've always struggled to answer the question of where I am from due to an expat childhood and itinerant early adult life, so it's good to see it so beautifully explored. Good luck finding your belonging place.
Thisbeautifulworld via FT.com

Re Jemima Kelly's "In defence of the U-turn – in politics and life", July 4/5. Quite – as Churchill (or more likely Keynes or Paul Samuelson) famously said: "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?" I am never sure why people are so keen on having convictions in their politicians. Most problems are complex, many solutions counter-intuitive. Much better to have politicians with no fixed opinions who can listen to evidence and change their mind accordingly.
Uler via FT.com

I was relieved to read this ("Lockdown is ending and I still can't finish the latest Hilary Mantel", July 4/5). Not one to normally give up on a book, I was defeated. It's nice not to feel alone in being overwhelmed (by everything these days).
4London via FT.com

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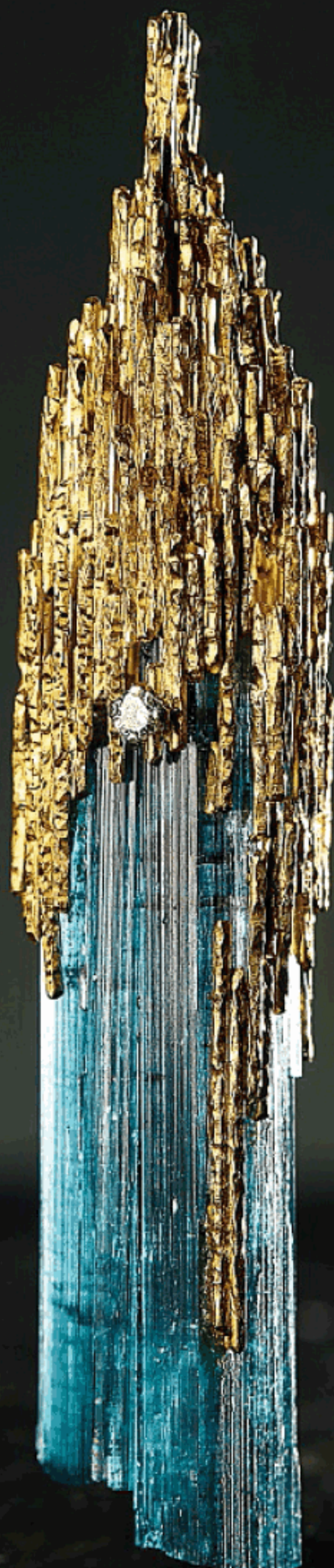
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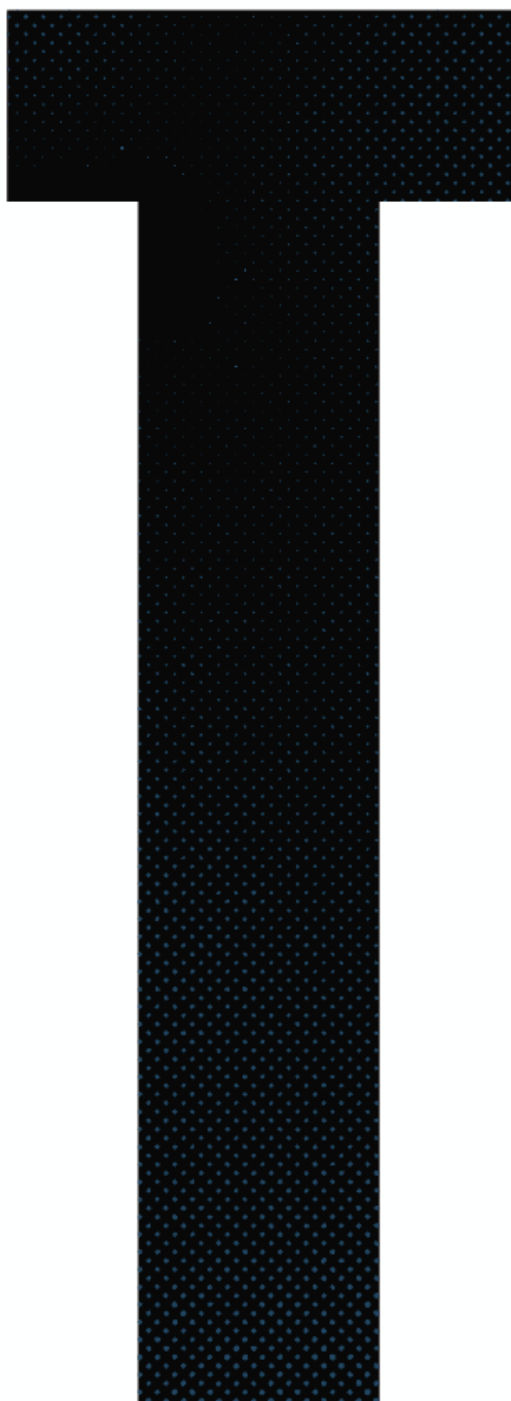
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HOW THE MAFIA INFILTRATED ITALY'S HOSPITALS

Once derided as mountain-dwelling goat farmers, the 'Ndrangheta clans of Calabria have metastasised into a globalised crime syndicate, plundering millions of euros from the healthcare system of the impoverished region and laundering it into pension funds and portfolios across the world. *Miles Johnson* investigates how they did it. Illustrations by *Sergiy Maidukov*





he body of his son was barely cold when the grieving father was threatened by men from the funeral company. Inside the mortuary of an austere hospital in Lamezia Terme, a city in southern Italy, the dead were not left in peace. Each corpse was now a highly prized commodity, worth thousands of euros to Europe's most ruthless organised criminals.

The men from the funeral company somehow knew which patients had passed away even before their own families did. Through intimidation, they had gained access to the hospital's central medical records, allowing them to screen for those sickest and most likely to die. If relatives considered picking a different funeral company to take away their loved one, the men would soon ensure they changed their minds.

"They are almost beating each other up to compete over sick patients," one terrified medical worker told a colleague in a conversation secretly recorded by Italian anti-Mafia investigators.

Medical staff were powerless to intervene. "They are acting with an unspeakable shamelessness," the employee said. "When the relatives arrived, they found the undertakers were already there."

This public hospital in the region of Calabria had been infiltrated by the 'Ndrangheta, a Mafia that remains little-known outside Italy but that has grown into one of the most dangerous, internationally active and financially sophisticated criminal enterprises in the western world.

Over the past two decades, the leading families of the 'Ndrangheta – pronounced "en-dran-ghet-ah" – have expanded operations far outside their small home region. Today they control a large part of cocaine importation into Europe, as well as arms smuggling, extortion and cross-border money laundering. Several hundred autonomous clans have transformed into one of Italy's most successful businesses, with some studies estimating their combined annual turnover to be as high as €44bn – believed by law-enforcement agencies to be more than all the Mexican drug cartels combined.

Yet even among such lucrative criminal activities, the riches on offer from plundering Italy's public health system stood out as a golden opportunity. By corrupting local officials, organised criminals have been able to make vast profits from contracts given to their own front companies, establishing monopolies on services ranging from delivering patients in faulty ambulances to transporting blood to taking away the dead.

All these services were billed to the Italian taxpayer through the country's centrally funded yet regionally administered health service, which distributes an annual budget of billions of euros – an unrivalled prize for criminal gangs. So tight was the clans' grip that doctors in Lamezia Terme reported having to wait outside a hospital ward for men from the 'Ndrangheta to open the locked door with their keys.

An investigation by the Financial Times has established how the trail of money from these crimes washed into the financial centres of London and Milan. Over the past five years, profits gained from the misery of patients in Calabrian hospitals were packaged up into debt instruments using the kind of financial engineering typically favoured by hedge funds and investment banks. Hundreds of millions of euros of these bonds, many containing dubious invoices signed off by parts of the

health system later found to have been infiltrated by organised crime, were sold to international investors ranging from Italian private banks to a pension fund in South Korea.

The previously unreported use of capital markets by Mafia clans profiting from Calabria's health crisis shows how far a criminal subculture once derided as mountain-dwelling goat farmers has metastasised into a globalised crime syndicate that is as comfortable operating in the world of high finance as it is extorting local businesses.

How the 'Ndrangheta emerged as one of the world's most successful criminal enterprises can only be understood by realising how well-suited its agile and entrepreneurial organisational structure, based on blood ties, is to maintaining a stranglehold on Calabrian public life.

Calabria is not only the poorest region in Italy, but one of the most deprived in the EU. With a population of two million, its gross domestic product per head is €17,200, almost half the European average. A US diplomatic cable in 2008 noted: "If it were not part of Italy, Calabria would be a failed state." The 'Ndrangheta, it said, "controls vast portions of its territory and economy, and accounts for at least three per cent of Italy's GDP (probably much more) through drug trafficking, extortion and usury".

A decade – and three Italian recessions – later the local economy has got worse, with the region consistently ranking in last place nationally in almost every category. Unemployment has increased from 12.9 per cent in 2010 to more than 20 per cent today.

For decades, almost no one in Italy paid any attention to the 'Ndrangheta, whose name originates from the Greek word for "courage". By the mid-1990s, however, a huge opportunity opened up before them. The Sicilian Cosa Nostra had been devastated by a sustained anti-Mafia campaign by the Italian state. The Calabrians seized on the chance to take over their relationships with Latin-American drug cartels.

Unlike the Cosa Nostra, the families that make up the 'Ndrangheta are not organised into a centralised, top-down structure, but instead operate their own autonomous units, or '*Ndrine*', each rooted in the territory it controls. And, unlike the Sicilian Mafia or the Camorra of Naples, membership of the different '*Ndrine* is almost entirely organised around blood relationships or by inter-marriage between clans. This has made them more resistant than other organised criminal groups to state penetration of their operations.

Patriarchs control which clan members are inducted into the organisation's higher levels, with sons frequently taking over should their fathers be imprisoned or killed. In March this year, Rocco Molè, a 25-year-old scion of one of Calabria's most established crime families, the Molè '*Ndrina* of the port of Gioia Tauro, was arrested and charged with importing a shipment of 500kg of cocaine hidden in plastic containers.

As different '*Ndrine* have become hugely wealthy, however, parts of their younger generations have started to look very different from the rural bandits of their grandfathers' era. With more money and increasingly complex operations, a new class of mobster has emerged that can apply business-school analysis to the challenges of running an international criminal conspiracy.



‘Calabrian healthcare has been in a state of emergency for decades. There are anti-Mafia operations, but then another clan comes in and it starts again’

Anna Sergi, criminologist

“A number of the younger generation, those who I grew up at the same time as, have degrees from the London School of Economics or even Harvard. Some have MBAs,” says Anna Sergi, a Calabrian-born criminologist at the University of Essex. “They live outside Calabria and appear like respectable businessmen, not directly involved in street-level illegality but there to offer technical expertise when it is needed.”

This increasing financial sophistication is coupled with a brutal approach to internal discipline. Those who are judged to have discredited the name of their family are at risk of being murdered by their own relatives. In 2011, the daughter of one criminal family died in agony after drinking hydrochloric acid. Her father, mother and brother were jailed for abuse after prosecutors failed to prove the more serious charge of forcing her to drink it as punishment for speaking to the police.

While there have been violent conflicts between rival ‘Ndrangheta clans, rational co-operation is accepted as good for business. Far less is known about the internal workings of the ‘Ndrangheta than other Mafias, but investigators have uncovered evidence of a centralised conflict-resolution committee made up of the most senior representatives of the largest ‘Ndrine.

Anti-Mafia investigators say it is common for multiple families to pool their resources into criminal joint ventures, especially those focused on cross-border shipments of cocaine worth hundreds of millions of euros.

It is through ruthless control over the economic activity inside their home territory that these families have created a base from which to rapidly expand their criminal activity abroad, reinvesting profits from extortion into highly lucrative drug trafficking and other criminal ventures. Anyone in their region who openly opposes the clans risks not only their own life, but also being blacklisted publicly. In some cases, the shadow of the ‘Ndrangheta stalks them both at home and wherever they go to escape.

Gaetano Saffioti, 59, runs a cement company in the town of Palmi, 100km from Catanzaro, the region’s capital. Eighteen years ago, he became one of a tiny handful of Calabrian businessmen to publicly testify against an ‘Ndrangheta clan that had extorted money from him. Saffioti lives under police protection to this day.

In the years that followed, his business didn’t win a single contract inside Calabria. When he tried in other parts of Italy, his company’s trucks were set on fire. When he won a contract in France, his trucks were torched again. “They demand their part of anything you do – it is a tax that everyone has to pay. You can’t sell an apartment without paying them, you can’t open a business without their permission,” he says, speaking by telephone from his heavily fortified home.

“It crushes the region,” he adds. “We are always getting poorer, but this is what they want. The weaker we are, the less likely we are to resist. The ‘Ndrangheta has got inside of us, inside our minds. The majority simply adapt to the system.”

Nicola Gratteri, 61, was born in Calabria and has lived there almost his entire life, but the public prosecutor barely knows what the area around him looks like today. As a consequence of fighting the ‘Ndrangheta, Gratteri has been under permanent police protection since 1989 and is unable ►

'Many people still think of the Mafia as drug dealers and extortionists, but there are many involved in making money out of Calabria who would appear as sophisticated businessmen. They would blend in at an investment bank'

Claudio Petrozziello, Italy's financial police representative in the UK

◀ to leave his office in Catanzaro without a bodyguard. Most days, he eats alone and works late into the evening. "I don't know the city where I live. I can't have normal relationships with people. I can't go to the cinema. I can't go for a walk or go to the beach six kilometres from my house. I leave in the morning, I eat in the office in the same room and go home," he says to the FT by phone.

As a child, Gratteri went to school with a boy whose father was murdered by the 'Ndrangheta. Another girl in his class was the daughter of a famous crime boss. One of his childhood friends later joined a clan. Decades after they played together as youths, Gratteri ended up prosecuting him in court.

Gratteri's dedication has made him increasingly well known across Italy. Yet he lives out each day in the knowledge that death is stalking him. Police have foiled multiple attempts on his life. In 2005, they discovered a cache of weapons, including Kalashnikovs, rocket launchers and plastic explosives, which they believed were intended to murder him and his bodyguards.

As he continues to prosecute cases against Calabria's leading criminal families, the number of people who want him dead has grown. "They gave me new cars that should withstand explosives, they gave me more security in my house, and on the route I take to the office," he says. "I'm very careful. I try to avoid dangerous situations, but recently it has become even more difficult."

There are few areas of Calabrian public life where "the system" Gratteri is fighting against is more evidently at work than the region's management of public health, where vast budgets create a perfect arena for corrupt local politics, business interests and organised crime to converge.

"In Calabria, the history of healthcare mirrors the failure of the state," says Sergi. "Every time there has been a new political faction coming in, someone is arrested – and it is always to do with the health system. Healthcare has been a red flag in Calabria for generations."

As these criminal families' profits from extortion, drug smuggling and defrauding the state have grown, so has the need to find increasingly complex ways of laundering it. London is one prime destination for 'Ndrangheta cash, according to Claudio

Petrozziello, Italy's financial police representative in the UK, who spends his days investigating how dirty money from organised crime washes up in Europe's financial capital.

Petrozziello's job has become harder as the lines between Mafia thugs and tie-wearing financiers with business degrees have increasingly blurred. "Many people still think of the Mafia as drug dealers and extortionists, but there are many who are involved in moving money out of Calabria who would appear as sophisticated businessmen. They would blend in at an investment bank or a multinational corporation," he says.

The story of how money looted from Calabria's hospitals ended up being routed into the global financial system illustrates the sophisticated ways in which the 'Ndrangheta launders the proceeds of its crimes. Through interviews and the analysis of financial documents and Italian legal filings, the Financial Times has found how the clans

made use of a vast financial conveyor belt. The proceeds of the horrors of the corrupted hospitals were unwittingly bundled up by intermediaries and mixed with other assets into debt products. These then flowed through the City of London, Luxembourg and Milan, eventually ending up in the investment portfolios of the clients of private banks and hedge funds.

From 2015 to 2018, hundreds of millions of euros of invoices signed off by officials in Calabria's cash-strapped municipal health authorities were purchased by intermediaries. These middlemen bought the unpaid invoices from suppliers at a steep discount because they were, in effect, guaranteed by the Italian state. They were then sold on to specialist financial companies, who merged them into pools of assets and sold investor bonds backed by the unpaid bills.

While many legitimate companies in Italy have used this process to offload debts owed to them by regional health authorities, the complex chain of intermediaries leaves it vulnerable to exploitation by organised criminals. Indeed, some of these same authorities were subsequently placed under emergency administration by the Italian state for full-scale Mafia infiltration. Several years after the invoices were sold, a number of the companies that had issued them were raided by anti-Mafia investigators for being fronts for 'Ndrangheta clans.

Front companies for organised crime working in the Italian healthcare sector managed to offload invoices owed to them by regional health authorities to unwitting intermediaries, who then sold them on again to legitimate financial companies. They then packaged them into specialised debt products marketed to investors hungry for exotic higher-yielding bonds at a time of record-low interest rates. Other investors in debt instruments connected to the Calabrian health system included hedge funds and various family offices, according to people involved in the deals.

None of these bonds was rated or assessed by major credit ratings agencies or traded on financial markets. Instead, some were privately placed by boutique investment banks, several of which have offices in Mayfair or the City of London.

One example of how money tainted by 'Ndrangheta activity ended up in the legitimate international financial sector is a so-called special ▶



Public prosecutor Nicola Gratteri's fight against the 'Ndrangheta has led to multiple attempts on his life: he has been under permanent police protection since 1989



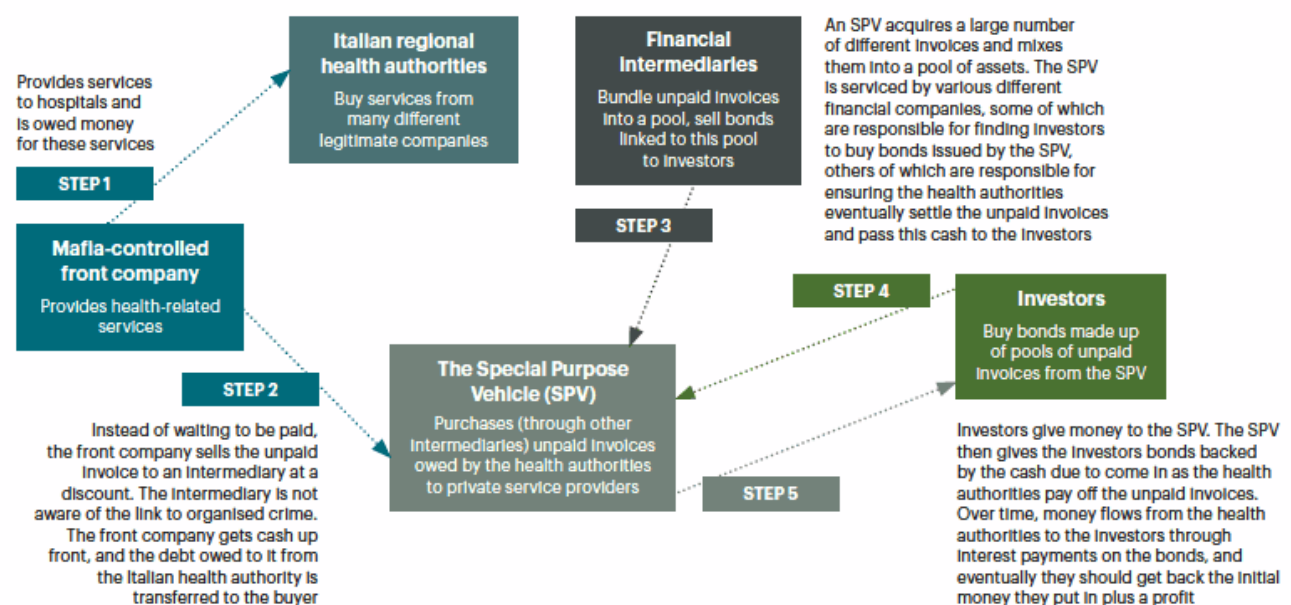
€44bn

The estimated annual turnover of the 'Ndrangheta – believed by law-enforcement agencies to be more than all the Mexican drug cartels combined

How it works

Regular health service companies working for Italian hospitals are owed money by Italian regional health authorities. Instead of waiting to be paid, they sell on the invoices at a discount. This helps them get cash up front, but they lose a bit on what they are owed due to the discount.

The buyers of these invoices package them up into a big pool of invoices inside a special purpose vehicle, SPV, and then sell bonds to investors backed by the invoices. The investors get paid interest on the bonds as the invoices are gradually paid off by the Italian health authorities. Intermediaries work to ensure the bills are paid, and the money flows from the health authority to the investor.



'It crushes the region. We are always getting poorer, but this is what they want. The weaker we are, the less likely we are to resist. The 'Ndrangheta has got inside of us. Inside our minds'

**Gaetano Saffloti,
local businessman**

◀ purpose vehicle called Chiron. In May 2017, this was one of numerous such entities established by companies specialising in healthcare financing in Italy.

The Chiron vehicle bought up close to €50m of unpaid healthcare invoices, including bills originating from Calabria and other parts of southern Italy. The ultimate buyer of the resulting bonds was the Luxembourg arm of the private bank of Generali, one of the largest insurance companies in the world, which was seeking to offer its clients higher-interest alternative investment products. The company that constructed the Chiron vehicle was CFE, a boutique investment bank with offices in London, Geneva, Luxembourg and Monaco. The Italian branch of EY, the global professional services firm, acted as a consultant on the deal.

One of the companies that contributed to Chiron's invoices was Croce Rosa Putrino SRL, an ambulance and funeral company servicing the hospital in Lamezia Terme. In late 2018, police arrested 28 people, after an investigation by the public prosecution office of Catanzaro alleged that various front companies for local 'Ndrangheta families, including Croce Rosa Putrino, had seized control of the hospital's funeral, ambulance and other health services. The case is still being prosecuted.

Banca Generali and CFE told the Financial Times that neither company had ever knowingly purchased any assets linked to the Calabrian healthcare system that had been connected to organised criminal activity. CFE said that it conducted significant due diligence on all the healthcare assets that it handled as a financial intermediary, and that it also relied on the checks of other regulated professionals who handled the invoices after their creation in Calabria. All the assets were deemed to be legal when acquired. CFE said that any invoices connected to organised crime it inadvertently handled made up a tiny amount of its business. Both companies said that any legal issues that emerged after the invoices had been acquired were immediately reported to the Italian authorities.

Another privately sold bond analysed by the FT included invoices issued by a Calabrian religious charity caring for African refugees. This was later

raided in an anti-Mafia operation for diverting EU funds into the hands of a powerful 'Ndrangheta clan. Gratteri, who led the investigation, described the food being provided to the refugees as "food that is usually given to pigs". Twenty-two people were convicted.

Last year, Italy's central government took drastic action. Rome dissolved the regional health authorities of Catanzaro and Reggio Calabria for Mafia infiltration, having discovered widespread fraud and double billing of invoices, as well as officials working inside them who had been banned from public office. They remain under special administration. But about €1bn of these private Italian healthcare bonds had been bought and sold between 2015 and 2019, according to market participants, with significant numbers of invoices originating from the two health authorities under emergency administration. The full scale of how much dirty money entered into the global financial system in this way is impossible to quantify.

"Large banks have stayed away from these sorts of healthcare-related deals in Italy," says one financial professional who has worked on similar transactions. "It is a difficult sector, and particularly in certain regions there are risks that anyone getting involved is going to have to face."

Massimo Scura, a Rome-appointed health commissioner for the region between 2015 and 2018, says that during his time there he tried to clamp down on rampant fraud, uncovering multiple cases of fraudulent invoicing and double payments for invoices that were sold on to investors. He is not accused of any wrongdoing. "I pointed out some debts that should not have been claimed, in addition to the payment of some double invoices," he says.

He blames a culture of corruption for the fraud. "The start of the problem is of an ethical nature in Calabria, it is cultural, because as long as within the companies there are individuals who are clearly conniving, it is extremely hard to provide our people with good healthcare."

The human cost of years of looting Calabria's health system has been devastating. Italy has one of the highest life expectancies in the world, but the region's health statistics are among the worst in Europe. The average number of years that Calabrians enjoy good health stands at 52.9, according to Italy's statistical office, lower than both Romania and Bulgaria. A resident in the wealthy northern Italian region of Bolzano, by comparison, enjoys on average 70 years of good health. Calabria also has the highest rate of infant mortality in Italy, while tens of thousands of "health refugees" leave the region each year to get treatment in better hospitals in the north.

Local doctors describe some of Calabria's hospitals, which are suffocating under mountains of debt built up through corruption, mismanagement and embezzlement, as on a par with the developing world.

In the corrupt hospital in Lamezia Terme, anti-Mafia investigators found evidence of widespread malpractice. Some employees were recorded joking as they discussed putting a new-born baby into a faulty incubator. "This time prepare yourself, in case they arrest us," one said as he laughed. "That incubator with the melted wires is disgusting. God bless us all tonight. I'll be at home praying [for the infant] with rosary beads." His colleague



Eighteen years ago, cement company manager Gaetano Saffloti testified publicly that an 'Ndrangheta clan had extorted money from him. He remains under police protection to this day

GETTY IMAGES; NICCOLÒ CARANTI



52.9

The average number of years that Calabrians enjoy good health before they are judged to develop a serious medical condition, compared with 70 years in the affluent Bolzano region

laughs again: "I hope it works." In another recording, an employee tells how a patient in a critical condition was dropped from a stretcher in an ambulance: "Let's hope he doesn't die because if he does, there will be trouble."

The impact of organised crime's infiltration of the health system has left many of the region's hospitals deeply vulnerable to coronavirus. "Calabria does not have the capacity to deal with [it]. There are not enough intensive care beds to take in patients in a serious condition," says Scura. (The region's decision to impose a strict lockdown seems to be working: Calabria has so far suffered fewer than 100 deaths from Covid-19, compared with almost 17,000 in Lombardy.)

The vast levels of debt built up by hospitals over the years have left the emergency administrators sent by Rome with few options. Many fear that organised criminal activity in the health service has become an entrenched feature of Calabrian life. "Calabrian healthcare has been in a permanent state of emergency for decades," says Sergi. "Every two or three years, there are anti-Mafia operations linked to healthcare, and maybe Rome parachutes people in, but soon after another clan comes in and starts it all over again."

For Gratteri, the public prosecutor, there is no choice but to keep on fighting against this Hydra-like enemy - and there are signs the battle is shifting in his favour. Late last year he struck his biggest blow yet against the clans, after an investigation he led resulted in the arrest of more than 300 people in the largest-ever single case brought against the 'Ndrangheta.

The charges include murder, money laundering, extortion and drug trafficking. The trial, due to begin with preliminary hearings later this month, will be the largest in Italy since the so-called maxi trial of the Sicilian Mafia in 1986. So many have been charged that the case will be held in the former offices of a call centre outside Catanzaro. "We must go forward, whatever it costs," Gratteri says. "In recent years, there has been the beginning of a new hope for change. We can't betray the hope of thousands of people for who we are the last resort."

For others, small, individual acts of resistance are the only way they can try to break the psychological power the clans hold over the region and their lives. Six years ago, the local authorities needed to demolish an illegally built villa that had been seized from a feared crime family. No local company would take on the contract.

Saffioti, whose cement business had been nearly destroyed after he testified against the clans, was the one man who said he would do the job. "When they asked me to help, I said, 'I will go and do it myself.' I demolished the house that no one else dared to. It wasn't to perform a heroic act, it was to show that a civil society is possible here, that there can be justice," he says.

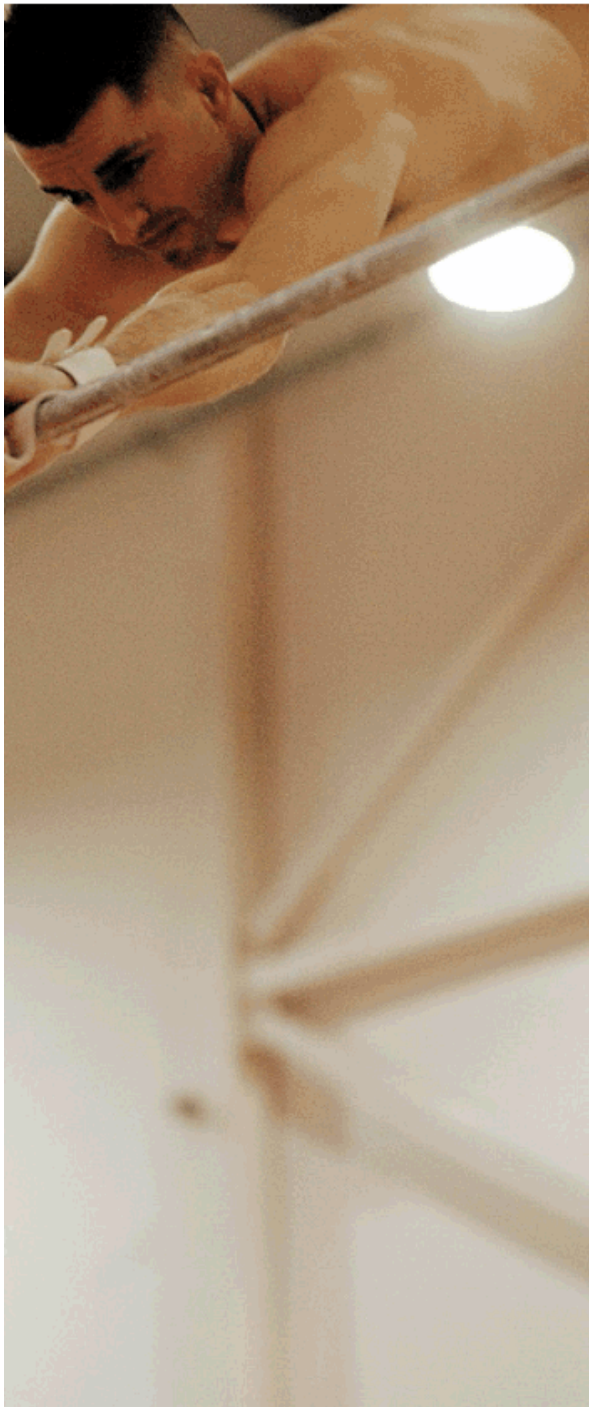
Saffioti remains under police protection but says he feels more free than he ever could by staying silent. "When we die, we want to believe that we did the right things, if we lived as slaves or we lived freely. I picked the second choice. For the good of all of our children, it was the least I could do." **FT**

Miles Johnson is the FT's Rome correspondent



Olympian, interrupted

Later this month, British gymnast Max Whitlock was supposed to be defending the gold medals he won at the last Olympics. But the postponement of the Tokyo Games has put his hopes on hold for at least a year. He talks to *Murad Ahmed* about yet another challenge in the race to stay on top. Photographs by *Lewis Khan*



Whitlock trains at the South Essex Gymnastics Club in Basildon in January. The postponement of the 2020 Games in Tokyo was announced in late March

The burden of a champion, says Max Whitlock, is to keep winning.

Four years ago at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Whitlock became the first British gymnast ever to win a gold medal. He ended the Games with two gold and one bronze medal to become the most decorated gymnast the country has ever produced.

Since then, Whitlock has been training 35 hours a week to be in top condition for the games in Tokyo, which were due to begin this month. He was the hot favourite to defend his title on the pommel horse, an apparatus invented around 315BC, when Macedonian soldiers used wooden horses to practise how to mount the equines they rode into battle.

Victory would have ranked the Englishman as among the greatest ever at an ancient skill that men have challenged themselves against for centuries. "The pressure just doesn't stop building," Whitlock told me when we first met in January. "The expectancy [is to] bring home a gold medal... Only one person is going to get it. That's hard. That's really hard."

But as the coronavirus pandemic began to rage, Whitlock, along with more than 11,000 other athletes expecting to travel to Japan this summer, was in limbo. Lockdowns closed gyms and training centres, disrupting training regimes the world over. Speculation mounted that the Games would have to be abandoned.

"At the time, [I was thinking that athletes] need to be patient," he recalls during a recent phone call. It was only in March, when the decision was finally taken to postpone the Olympics until next summer, that the reality hit. "My first feeling was shock. The Olympic Games hasn't been [called off except for] world wars... it's a bit of a crazy time."

Thousands of athletes went through similar emotions. Katarina Johnson-Thompson, the world heptathlon champion, described the move as "heartbreaking". "I'm a very positive person," said double Olympic taekwondo champion Jade Jones, "but the idea, right now, of having to devote myself to another year's slog is a very difficult one."

Does Whitlock feel a similar hint of anger, any sense of loss? "It's only postponed," he says, declining to even contemplate the doubts that the Games can ever be staged without a Covid-19 vaccine. "I've kept motivation high because my targets are still exactly the same."

Far from being despondent, the 27-year-old accentuates the positives: "You can always sit back, year in, year out and think that you've got a fair amount of time and it's still far, far away," he says. "To be honest, the Olympics was coming around really, really quick."

This can-do attitude, which I have come to recognise from our conversations, is the peculiar mindset of a man obsessed with staying on the pedestal onto which he has climbed. My plan had been to chronicle Whitlock's build up to the Games. I envisaged a case study on reaching the top of elite sport, what it takes to become the best on the planet in a chosen endeavour. But talking to the gymnast over recent months, as he waits for his moment, reveals a different tale.



Whitlock practises his routine on the pommel horse

'The expectancy is to bring home a gold medal... Only one person is going to get it. That's hard. That's really hard'



Whitlock with the two gold medals he won at the Rio 2016 Games



Whitlock: 'Not many people do [the most difficult skills], because it's so risky'

It is the challenge of remaining at the pinnacle, that bit longer, once you're already there.

The lockdown has not halted Whitlock's preparations. At his home in Essex, where he lives with wife Leah, he waits until their 16-month-old daughter Willow takes a mid-morning nap. Then he goes to the back garden and removes a barbecue cover from a pommel horse.

Unlike its wooden ancestor, this is a sleek contraption: metallic legs hold up a cylindrical body more than a metre from the ground. The body is covered in leather, with two handles that point upward. Gymnasts (in modern competition only men use the pommel horse) must use solely their arms to stay on it, performing a series of moves in a routine that lasts around a minute, all without losing momentum or falling off.

Whitlock repeats the same manoeuvres he has practised for the past four years, over and over again. "It's given me another window... to clean up my routine even more. Focus on the finer details. As an athlete, you always find that competitions are here before you know it."

The routine remains similar to the one I observed in January at the South Essex Gymnastics Club in Basildon, a vast hall covered in soft padding hidden within a suburban leisure centre. Boys and girls in leotards were swinging between high bars, somersaulting across the floor and, every so often, falling flat on their faces.

In one corner, a topless Whitlock joked around with other muscular young men. He appears shorter and slither than the other gymnasts but, up close, his arms and thighs bulge. During a training session, they took turns to mount a pommel horse. His colleagues, each harbouring the dream of representing Britain at an Olympics some day, would struggle to stay on for more than a few seconds. But Whitlock, his shock of brown hair never out of place, made the task look easy.

First, he practised a "triple Russian", twisting his hands around a single handle, swinging his straightened body above the pommel horse three times. A few minutes later, a "Busnari", named after Italian gymnast Alberto Busnari, spinning his body around while performing a handstand with legs flared wide apart. These are among the toughest "skills" that can be performed on a pommel horse and Whitlock stitches them together for a full routine at official competitions. "Not many people do [the most difficult skills], because it's so risky," he says.

Those risks are worth taking because modern gymnastics is not just about the pursuit of perfection. For the casual viewer, this perception arose from the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, when Nadia Comaneci, a 14-year-old Romanian, scored the sport's first "perfect 10". The watching crowds were in raptures, knowing a new peak had been achieved. But by 2000, that scoring system was broken. Gymnasts regularly scored 10s simply by completing routines with the minimal requirements of difficulty and avoiding any errors.

In 2006, the International Federation of Gymnastics, the sport's global governing body, replaced scores out of 10 with the "Code of Points". Gymnasts are now given two scores on each apparatus they attempt. The first is for execution, capped at 10. The second score is for difficulty but is open-ended. It can be confusing to those watching but, essentially, the system ►

◀ incentivises the daring over the cautious. "It's a big challenge trying to crack that balance of difficulty and perfection," says Whitlock.

There's real risk involved in this. The strains on the body mean that injuries are common. Fatalities are rare, but have occurred.

Training can be dangerous in other ways. This week, former British gymnasts spoke about physical and mental abuse from coaches, prompted by the Netflix documentary *Athlete A*, which exposed the scale of abuse in USA gymnastics that allowed convicted paedophile and former Olympic team doctor Larry Nassar to continue offending.

The result of the scoring changes, however, has been a new era of mesmerising, astonishing, gravity-defying gymnastics. Today it is a sport dominated by the likes of the USA's Simone Biles and Japan's Kohei Uchimura, who are pushing the human body to previously unimaginable feats.

The need to constantly improve, to continually break the mould, increases as the Code of Points changes every four years after each Olympics. Skills once considered difficult are downgraded. Tougher routines are demanded. There is also the subjectivity of judges, who may have an unconscious bias towards champions, but can get bored with what past winners have already produced.

"I'm judged by humans," says Whitlock. "After Rio, I wanted to never do the same routine as I'd done in the Olympics ever again. I wanted to make upgrades and change them up... I put myself in [the judges'] shoes because they sit there with a pen and paper, probably from 8 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock at night, watching gymnasts do routines in a competition."

The requirement for continual evolution appeals to Whitlock. When he was seven, a friend at a swimming club near his parents' home in Hemel Hempstead, suggested going to a local gymnastics centre. "Literally, the minute I stepped [in], I loved it," he says. "It's so rewarding as a sport, especially when you're young and building up, because there's over 1,000 skills that you can learn in the whole book. There's so many stages to learn a new skill. But the feeling of completing [each stage] is unbelievable."

He also displayed the preternatural dedication required in a sport where the physical demands mean male gymnasts peak in their early twenties. Aged 12, Whitlock followed his first coach, Klemen Bedinek, to the Slovenian's home town of Maribor but, after three months living abroad, he missed home and came back to train instead at South Essex club under the tutelage of Scott Hann, a highly regarded English coach.

The move paid off in more ways than one. At training, Whitlock met his future wife Leah, then a gymnast. Aged 19, he won bronze on the pommel horse at the London 2012 games. Four years later, he became Olympic champion on the apparatus, while also collecting a more unexpected gold for his floor routine and one other bronze medal in team events.

Hann tells me Whitlock wasn't necessarily made for greatness. For one, his physique is not ideal. Whitlock has "slow twitch" muscles, rather than the explosive "fast twitch" muscle fibres that sprinters have to achieve explosive speed and



Male gymnasts compete in six events: floor exercise, pommel horse, still rings, vault, parallel bars and high bar

'[The delay] has given me another window... to clean up my routine even more. As an athlete, you always find that competitions are here before you know it'



Whitlock's routine on the pommel horse at Rio 2016 won him his second gold medal in a day

GETTY IMAGES

power. He can't open up his hips as widely or jump as high as other gymnasts. "It's not a sport where you're first across the line or where you knock someone out and you're the winner," says Hann.

Physical deficiencies mean Whitlock must take bigger risks to win. This is where the Code of Points works to his advantage. His starting score is 17 on the pommel, higher than any rival. This allows him more room to make mistakes than opponents. But he has to work harder than most to gain this edge.

"A lot of talented people are lazy, because when they're young it comes easy," Whitlock says. "So, the foundations aren't put in. The work ethic isn't there. They grow up and they get older, and they look and think, 'What's going on?' Everyone around them is working so hard and starting to overtake their mega talent. It happens so often."

What many do not realise about elite sport is repetitive training is not merely about sculpting the body, getting fitter and stronger. It is also about moulding the mind, changing the very structure of the brain. In one famous study in 2000, scientists at University College London took brain scans of London black-cab drivers who enter their trade by passing "The Knowledge", a test of their ability to recall all the streets of the city. It was found that the hippocampus, the part of the brain crucial for navigation, memory recall and imagining future events, grew larger the longer cabbies spent on the job.

A number of studies have shown the regions of the brain associated with recalling physical skills are also reshaped through constant practice. Just like driving a car or riding a bike, what starts off as difficult becomes easier, then, eventually, automatic. The neural pathways are strengthened, the way a path in a field becomes flatter the more it is walked over.

What does Whitlock think about during a performance? He is barely conscious. Spinning and twirling results in vision being a blur. He hears very little. "I presume it's quite quiet," he says. I was in the arena when he performed in Rio. It was deafeningly loud. Whitlock is surprised. "A lot of the time, you can't remember what you were thinking about," he says. "You're zoned in."

But practice does not make perfect. Humans are not robots. Fallibility is in our nature. No amount of training can avoid a fluffed tennis shot or a shanked golf drive. Mistakes happen. It's how you deal with them that counts. And Whitlock has even found a way to train for that too.

"Gymnastics is judged on how it looks [but training] on a pommel horse I go round and round. My legs will be bent. They'll be apart... I don't care how it looks. I do it just to do the movements, test them around. Make myself feel comfortable." Through this process, he is learning how to execute moves like a triple Russian or a Busnari while on unconscious "autopilot". But he is also configuring his mind to make the tiny and incremental adjustments if his body shape is not quite right. "A lot of people, when they get onto the pommel horse, it goes scruffy and then they have to neaten it up again," he says. "I train scruffy 80 per cent of the time. I think that's been a huge thing for me, throughout my whole career, being able to recover."

In a sense, says Whitlock, the postponement of the Olympics is just another error to correct for.

"I train to make sure that I can recover if mistakes happen," he says. "In the grand scheme of things, in the bigger picture, this is a similar thing... that might be the way that I drive a lot of motivation for the challenge [of training for another year]. That's the way I view this."

Picture the scene. It is October 13 2019. The arena is dark at the world artistic gymnastics championship in Stuttgart, Germany, an event considered second only to the Olympics in the sport.

Hundreds of spectators watch in the stands as Whitlock, wearing a leotard in the colours of the Union Jack, lifts his right arm in the air to signal the start of the routine. The handles of the pommel horse come up to his armpits. With a flex of the arms, a swing of the legs, he moves into a handstand, body 90 degrees to the ground. Upside down, Whitlock loses balance for a split second. His left hand moves off the handle and touches the leather. Casual observers will miss it. The judges will not. It is a critical lapse.

"Three-tenths deduction straightaway, which is huge," he says. "Absolutely massive in a pommel horse final, in any final like that. This is where I come out of autopilot. The amount of things that run through your head so quickly is unbelievable... If I want any chance, the rest of my routine needs to be absolutely perfect - so, there was no holding back."

Over the next 50 seconds, Whitlock goes flat out. His brain adapts to the error. The rest of his routine, the most difficult attempted by the nine finalists, is close to flawless. His final score is 15.500. Whitlock wins by 0.067 of a point. "That's a flicker of the foot," he says. "That's how small that margin is."

The victory at last year's World Championships was too close for comfort, he says. With an extra year to prepare for the Olympics, he has more time to get the routine just right. Fewer mistakes, fewer points lost in deductions.

There are problems with waiting, though. He gets more tired than when he was younger. Another 12 months will cause more strain on what is, by gymnastics standards, a creaking body. "Your whole bodyweight is on your wrists," he says. "As you do more and more reps [in practice], the fatigue, especially for me nowadays, gets crazy."

Growing exhaustion in his legs means Whitlock is still weighing up whether to defend his Olympic title on the floor next year. He wants to continue until the Paris Games in 2024, when he will be 31. For his ageing body to cope, he says he will train for just the pommel horse and nothing else.

Yet, already at the top of his game, Whitlock is happy with more time to snap his synapses into place so that his muscles respond better than ever. It's an unexpected advantage, if you're willing to put in the effort. But then, he's already put in a lifetime's work for a minute's performance. Another year may help him remain unbeatable. When the time comes.

"The most important thing is to stay focused on consolidating my routine even more," he says. "One of my proudest achievements is keeping the highest difficulty, the hardest routine in the world. I have got that," he pauses. "At the moment." 

Murad Ahmed is the FT's sports editor



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Have you heard the one about the offensive joke?

There's no right or easy way to deal with derogatory quips but inaction comes at a cost, writes *Orla Ryan*

On the eve of our ninth wedding anniversary, I was woken by the sound of my husband texting furiously on his phone. Someone we knew had posted a joke about Irish people in a WhatsApp group. I am Irish, my husband is English. He doesn't engage much with social media so I felt sure there must be a misunderstanding.

He passed me the phone and I read the joke. It wasn't that bad. There was no balaclava or gelignite, no allusions to terrorism, no red-faced drunken leprechauns. But the butt of the joke, like all the others of its kind, was that the Irish are thick. My heart sank.

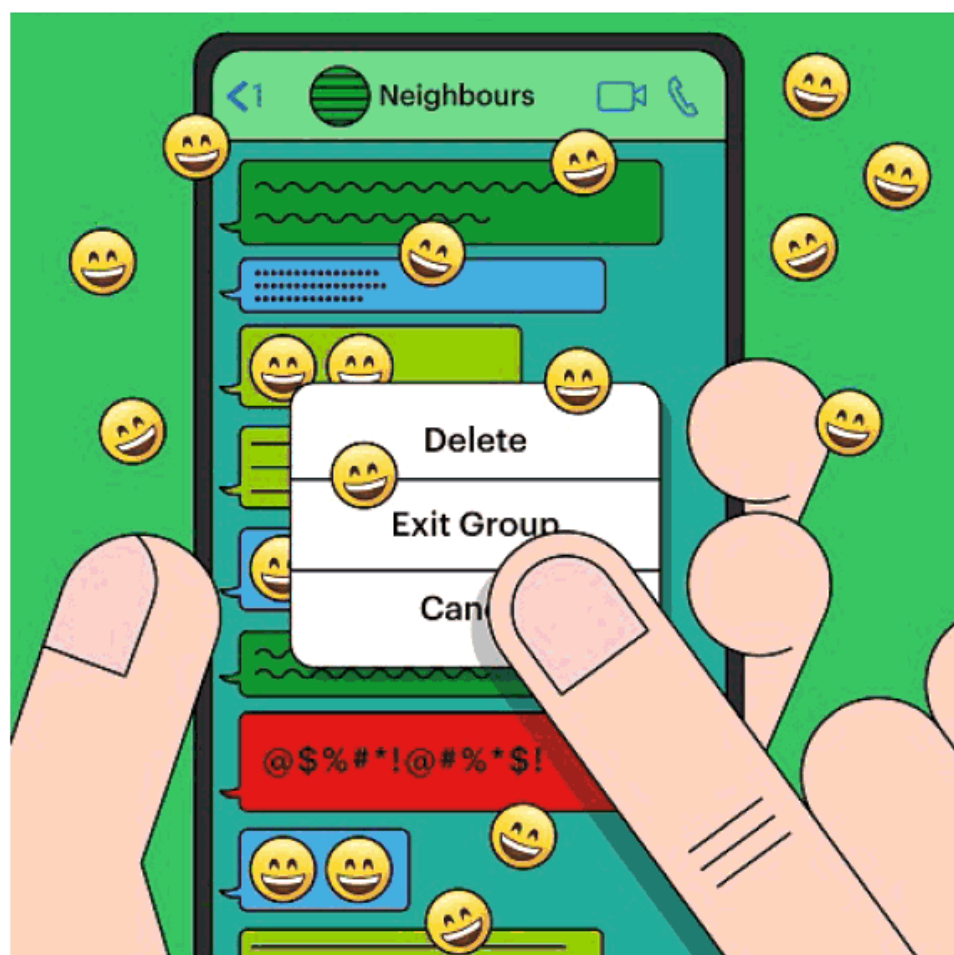
My husband wanted to message the person directly and tell them to delete it. No one else had posted a response. Maybe they'd read it. Maybe they hadn't. I asked him not to do anything. At least, not just yet.

Before I came to the UK as a student in the late eighties, I hadn't realised that anyone considered Irish people to be of inferior intelligence. That time was, it has to be said, not a heyday for Anglo-Irish relations. It was four years after the IRA's attack on the Conservative party conference in Brighton, and less than a decade since 10 Republican prisoners had died on hunger strike in the Maze prison in Belfast. The Birmingham Six and Guildford Four were still in prison for terror attacks they didn't commit. My father waved me off with stories from his own student days in the sixties of bottling beer in an Enfield brewery and boarding house signs saying "no dogs, no blacks, no Irish".

On my degree course, there was some shock at the strength of my accent, but there were also Irish lecturers and fascination with Irish culture. A well-meaning college friend gave me a postcard of the comedian Bernard Manning telling a joke about "this thick Paddy". Behind him were the names of the Irish nobel laureates WB Yeats, George Bernard Shaw and Samuel Beckett. I knew I was being given the postcard out of a sense of solidarity but I didn't really ►



Illustrations by Namyoung An



'It needed to be dealt with. But was it really my job to explain to someone why this joke was offensive? If I say something, I said, they'll think I'm humourless and have a chip on my shoulder'

◀ I feel I needed it. I'd never heard of Manning ("Irish fella went for a job on a building site. They said: 'What's your name?' He said: 'Paddy Mulligan.' They asked: 'How do you spell it?' He said: 'Stick the job up your arse.'"). And I wasn't aware that many British people had grown up with Irish jokes, a tradition that dated back to satirical magazines such as *Punch* in the 1840s. I'd learnt in school that we were the land of saints and scholars. I might have questioned the sainthood but I never questioned the intelligence.

If anything, I arrived in the UK at the tail end of the Irish joke. Manning had given way to the campaigning humour of Ben Elton and, before long, it was the time of *Father Ted*, the satirical comedy about three priests living on the fictional Craggy Island. I remember British friends of Irish descent being initially unsure of what to make of it, sensing another Irish joke was being played on them. But it wasn't that, it was clever and fresh, completely Irish and brimming with that wonderful self-confidence that allows for self-deprecation. Whereas Irish jokes belittled, *Father Ted* made fun of something I recognised. "One thing I'm really proud of," co-writer Graham Linehan told the *Guardian* in 2015, "is that Ted replaced the old, hackneyed Irish joke with Irish humour, which is a very different thing."

The mid-nineties arrival of *Father Ted* was three years before the Good Friday Agreement that brought an end to the Troubles, the three decades and more of violence in which thousands died. The Irish economy was booming and suddenly it seemed there was a whole generation who had never heard an Irish joke or been aware of an IRA terror campaign. Those attitudes belonged to the seventies and eighties, to people who talked about papists and the Free State, said "begob" and "begorrah" and mimicked Irish accents. These people may still exist, but they are very few.

So it was a shock to read the joke on the WhatsApp group and I was unsure of what to do.

We live in multicultural suburban London and belong to several local message groups for kids' birthday parties, swimming groups, sports activities, neighbourhood meetings and school. We know these people, we also don't know them. I suddenly felt that maybe I'd stumbled on something very English, and received a clear sign that I was in the wrong place. The person who had posted the joke knew I was Irish; they seemed perfectly nice. But was this what people really thought? What did they think I was going to do when they posted the joke? Or had they not thought at all? How was I supposed to react now?

There's no playbook for what to do when faced with this kind of situation, says Alex Czopp, a professor of psychology who has published research on what happens when people speak up about prejudice. "Confrontations are awkward, you are implying... that someone has a bias that the vast majority of us are appalled by, some people respond very negatively." The person might only be dimly aware of my Irishness but if I brought this up then that would be all they would see.

Also, he adds: "Humour is almost inherently ambiguous, it's not meant to be taken seriously." In fact, I anticipated that if I brought it up, I might be told about distant Irish relatives or friends, all of whom had a much better sense of humour than me and none of whom would have remotely had a problem with this. Very quickly, the problem would be seen as mine.

This can be the case, Czopp says, if the offence is seen as marginal, for example, bias faced by the wealthy or privileged or prejudice by women against men. It "doesn't fit the prototype of how prejudice is supposed to look, it feels a less egregious offence", he says. Maybe, I thought, the person who posted the WhatsApp joke operated, like many people, a hierarchy of offence and simply thought Irish jokes didn't count.

People who complain about a positive stereotype, such as the "caring" female, can

also be given short shrift, adds Czopp. In fact, those most likely to get a sympathetic hearing, at least from bystanders, are those who speak up for other people, for example, white people who speak out against racism or men who speak up for women.

It's little surprise that fewer of these conversations take place face to face. Online, more people are willing to speak out. "If you can do it behind your avatar in the comments section of an article, it changes the cost-benefit analysis," says Czopp, but often that just "fans flames of outrage on both sides, you're a terrible person for having said it, you're a terrible person for being offended by it".

This was the last thing I wanted. I know that in the grand scheme of things, in a world full of prejudice and protests and dreadful abuse, where black people are killed by the police, the fact that I don't like a joke about "thick Paddies" is a minor matter. I know many people repeat jokes or phrases they've heard without immediately understanding the implication. Put on the defensive, they can then dig in. Everything becomes worse. I thought of the *Father Ted* episode, where he ties himself into contortions over racism. "I wouldn't have done a Chinaman impression if I'd known there was going to be a Chinaman there to see me doing a Chinaman impression," he tells Father Dougal.

Ultimately, however, I knew there was a cost to inaction. I have sat red-faced and awkward through too many similar encounters. Whether the joke is about Irish people or an offensive comment or slur about another race or group, you lose your sense of integrity if you don't speak up.

And what if they made a joke about Irish people in front of my children, who could absorb this idea that Irish people were stupid, repeat the joke to their cousins and have their asses kicked at the next family party?

According to Czopp, it could be in the offenders' best interests to have this pointed out

to them, even if it doesn't go down too well at first. "There is considerable research suggesting we can have an effect on behaviour, privately and publicly," he says. "We might not see it happening, those downstream consequences might occur out of our sight, we [may] get initial negativity, but we might have had an impact."

I slept badly that night and woke up before 6am. I had left the group but could still read the joke. I was hesitant. Stop overthinking it, my husband said. If anything, he was more upset than me. If someone says something racist, call them out, he said. Immediately, and not in a few weeks when you've finally figured out what you think about it or where it fits on some arbitrary scale of historical offence. As *Father Ted* would say: "Down with this sort of thing."

It needed to be dealt with. But was it really my job to explain to someone why this joke was offensive? If I say something, I said, they'll think I'm humourless and have a chip on my shoulder. It's easier for you because you're not Irish. You married an Irish woman, I joked, this was the deal. You brought it to my attention, you do it. So that morning, he met the person who ran the group. They hadn't seen the joke and were horrified when they did. They spoke to the person who'd posted it, who was embarrassed and apologetic and swore off social media. They tried to delete the message but succeeded in only deleting it for themselves, so it is still there. Resting in the WhatsApp account, to use one final *Father Ted* joke.

I still don't know why they posted it, or even if they understood what they were doing when they sent it. I'm not sure I want to know. A few months on, I'm embarrassed I got my husband to fight my battles for me. It would have been better if I'd done it myself. There is, after all, nothing wrong with standing up for yourself. **FT**

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Orla Ryan is the FT's Middle East and Africa news editor



TEL AVIV'S SKYSCRAPERS ARE VISIBLE FROM THE AYALON HIGHWAY NEAR THE KIBBUTZ GALUYOT EXIT. EMPTY IN THIS IMAGE, IT WOULD USUALLY BE HEAVY WITH TRAFFIC AT MOST HOURS OF THE DAY. ALL PHOTOGRAPHS WERE TAKEN BETWEEN APRIL 6 AND 23 2020



S I G N O F T H E T I M E S

During Israel's lockdown, these billboards stood blank above empty roads, advertising nothing. For photographer Daniel Tchetchik, they were an eerie reminder of how life had come to a pause. By *Griselda Murray Brown*



ROKAH ROAD IN NORTH TEL AVIV NEAR YARKON PARK, THE CITY'S EQUIVALENT TO NEW YORK'S CENTRAL PARK



SOUTH TEL AVIV INDUSTRIAL AREA, WITH AYALON HIGHWAY IN THE FOREGROUND

A few months ago, as cities across the world went into lockdown, once bustling high streets fell quiet, their shops shuttered and strangely blank-looking. Some of those shutters have started to lift again, but this will be how many of us remember those early weeks: deserted thoroughfares, abandoned building sites, once busy junctions suddenly wide open.

The Israeli photographer Daniel Tchetchik noticed something else too. He wanted to convey the “eerie and disturbing feeling of the lockdown”, he recalls in a statement accompanying his latest body of work, but images of “empty streets or people with masks” didn’t quite capture it. Instead, in April, he drove around Tel Aviv “just looking at the urban sprawl: vacant, quiet... And then I started to spot them, huge black monoliths that were a by-product of the full lockdown.” These monoliths were roadside billboards: with little passing traffic, the companies that usually rented them had no reason to do so. So they stood there, advertising nothing. The absence of other cars even meant Tchetchik was able to stop on the highway, get out and photograph them. ►



THE GEHA INTERCHANGE



NORTH AYALON BILLBOARD SIGN, SEEN FROM A DESERTED TRAIL

◀ Stripped of their brand names, products, smiling faces – and all the carefully calibrated connotations those images carry – the boards invite different interpretations. “Their shapes... sent my imagination into the past,” Tchetchik writes. “Some looked like... spitting images of Kubrick’s monoliths from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or perhaps huge smartphones that had finally run out of battery, and others reminded me of tombstones.”

Advertising takes you by the hand, telling you what to think. But the best art leaves you to wander freely, to make up your own mind. The vacant billboards in Tchetchik’s pictures look like art installations – little punctures in the normal urban fabric. They are both eloquent and oddly mute.

As many countries begin to return to something resembling normal life, we are losing some of the strange stillness of those early days of lockdown. In Tel Aviv, cars and people returned to the streets and the billboards were plastered with ads again. Then, this week, the health minister Yuli Edelstein announced that restrictions would be reimposed in parts of Israel following a surge in coronavirus cases. The stark beauty of Tchetchik’s pictures serves as both a reminder of a quieter time – and a warning. **FT**

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Griselda Murray Brown is an FT commissioning editor.

To see more photographs from Daniel Tchetchik’s “Maybe It’s a Sign” project, visit danieltchetchik.com



SOUTH TEL AVIV, NEAR THE PROMENADE THAT RUNS ALONG THE CITY BEACHES



AYALON HIGHWAY FROM THE HALACHA BRIDGE FACING NORTH





Honey & Co Recipes



Shoulder high

Photographs by Patricia Niven

We started offering a meal pick-up service from our deli during lockdown. It was a privilege to leave the house, to have a purpose and to see people. Through empty streets customers came – for Easter meals and Passover, Ramadan and Eid, for happy occasions and sad ones. They wanted something nice to eat or to have an excuse to get out and talk to someone new about something other than the virus.

We got to glimpse little snapshots of others' lives. A couple ordered a meal for two and a bottle of champagne on the day they were meant to get married. Another couple wanted to celebrate their joint recovery from coronavirus – he had temporarily lost his sense of taste and smell but still wanted the experience of a festive meal, cooked by someone else. One family, split between four households, all ordered food for the same day so they could see each other when they came to collect it, and later shared a meal online. Another ordered food for their elderly mother's birthday, which they were supposed to celebrate at our restaurant, a favourite of hers.

As lockdown eased, orders increased: meals for two became meals for four, six and even eight. We began to hear different stories – about family feuds put aside, friends gathering for postponed birthdays, wakes or simply to hang out.

Local lamb is at its prime at this time of year and the shoulder is our go-to cut when it comes to a big feast. It requires very little of the cook – just seasoning and some time in a low oven, where it can stay until everyone is ready to eat. It's almost impossible to ruin. All the separate shoulder muscles offer something different by way of flavour and bite, and the bones ensure a rich, tasty gravy. We add fresh peas and freekeh – smoked green wheat – to the tray, but you can also use cracked wheat or rice (any grain cooked in that gravy will be the better for it). Bring it all to the table together. This is not the time to be fussing in the kitchen – there's a lot of catching up to do. **FT**

By Itamar Srulovich. Recipe by Sarit Packer

Lamb shoulder roasted in freekeh and peas

To feed four to six guests

- 1 small new season lamb shoulder (about 2.5kg on the bone)
- 1 tbs rough sea salt
- 1 tbs dried Greek oregano
- 1 tbs dried crumbled rosemary
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 whole head of garlic, broken into cloves, unpeeled
- 3 large onions each cut into six wedges through the stem
- 200g freekeh (or coarse cracked wheat)
- 250g fresh podded peas (from 500g pods or you can use frozen)

1 — Use a sharp knife to make deep slits down the lamb shoulder. Mix the salt with the oregano, rosemary and pepper and rub it all over the lamb. Place it on a large roasting tray and leave it to marinate for about two hours. Alternatively, cover and leave it in the fridge for up to six hours.

2 — Heat your oven to 200C (fan assist). Once the oven is hot, place the lamb in the centre and roast for 25-30 minutes or until golden all over.

3 — Add the whole garlic cloves and onion wedges to the roasting tin and return to the oven for another 10 minutes. Remove again. Pour two cups of boiling water over the food and cover the tray. Reduce the oven to 180C and roast it for an hour.

4 — Remove from the oven, baste really well with the liquid that has formed in the bottom of the roasting tray and add the freekeh. Make sure the freekeh is submerged in liquid to just cover it. You can top it up a little if needed.

5 — Take out the roasting tin. Reduce the heat to 160C and put it back in for another 40 minutes. Remove again, baste the lamb with a few tablespoons of fresh water, then add the peas to the freekeh and return to the oven for the final 20 minutes before serving.





‘No food was ever as tasty as Nonna’s. She was damn sure of it – and made sure we were too’

I owe my love of Italian cooking – and therefore my lockdown waistline – to my Nonna. Some of my happiest childhood memories are of sitting at her dining table, tucking into a giant bowl of fresh pasta with slow-cooked beef ragù. I’d gobble it down in a hurry. “*Mangia!*” she would say, piling more on to my plate. “You need to eat.”

No food was ever as tasty as Nonna’s. She was damn sure of it – and made sure we were too. If our family went to a relative’s house for dinner, a week or so later, she’d conspicuously cook us the same meal. “Better than theirs?” she’d ask. “*Si, Nonna.*”

At Italian restaurants, she’d quiz my brother and me. “How’s the pasta?” “Not as good as yours, Nonna,” we’d chant back. The staff would chuckle. “Well-trained,” they’d say. But we were just telling the truth.

Nonna arrived in Canada with my father and grandfather from the northern Italian city of Trieste in the wake of the border changes following the second world war. They were

refugees from Istria with just a few belongings, hopes for a better life and Nonna’s family recipes. Her new country was different, but her cooking stayed the same. (Nonnas do not, as a rule, do fusion.)

From her handmade *fusi* (a penne-like pasta), to hearty sauces that elevated unloved cuts of meat and *baccalà* (salted cod), she knew how to squeeze the most value and flavour from the ingredients she used.

She stopped cooking about a decade ago when it became too much work for a person her age. There was no one to cook for anyway: her grandchildren had grown up and moved abroad. Three years ago, she had a stroke that badly damaged half of her brain. Now 92 and living in a care home, she can’t walk, her speech is impaired and she doesn’t always remember much. But we do.

So when the pandemic hit and Londoners started stocking their store cupboards, I reached for an ingredient I grew up eating in my Nonna’s kitchen: polenta.

Polenta is the unsung hero of carbohydrates in Italian cooking, especially when you consider how versatile it is. It can be a vehicle for savoury sauces and stews (as it is here), sliced and pan-fried into the undisputed best side dish, chips, or used in an assortment of delicious desserts. You don’t see spaghetti working that hard.

Like most Italian food, polenta is the subject of regional debate, marking a border between north and south. It was first popular in the *cucina povera* (peasant cooking) of northern Italy, but it wasn’t eaten much elsewhere.

Several years ago, my mother, keen to impress the most challenging type of in-law (the Italian mother of an only son) reported that she had taken a cooking class from a Sicilian chef. “We made polenta,” she said proudly.

“What do southern Italians know about cooking polenta?” my Nonna responded.

Today it is enjoyed widely – and can be eaten at some of the world’s best restaurants – but southern Italians still call northerners “*polentoni*” (polenta eaters).



King prawn and fennel stew

Makes two good portions

- 2 tbs olive oil
- 77g diced pancetta
- ½ yellow onion, finely diced
- ½ fennel bulb, stalks and fronds removed, cut in half and finely sliced (about 140g sliced)
- 2 cloves of garlic, finely diced
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- ½ tsp chilli flakes (or to taste)
- 400g chopped tomatoes
- 280g king prawns, shelled and deveined
- 20g flat-leaf parsley, chopped

1 — Heat a Dutch oven or iron skillet over a medium heat and add oil.

2 — Add pancetta and cook until it's crispy (six to eight minutes). Remove with a slotted spoon, set aside.

3 — Add onion and sliced fennel. Season. Lower heat to medium-low and sweat for about 10 minutes until soft.

4 — Bring heat back to medium. Add garlic, fennel seeds, chilli flakes. Cook for two more minutes.

5 — Add tomatoes. Clean the can with a splash of water and add that too. Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to medium-low. Cook for 10 minutes.

6 — Bring heat to medium. Add the prawns, cook until just pink (three minutes usually). Stir in the pancetta and most of the parsley.

7 — Serve atop the polenta. Drizzle with olive oil. Garnish with remaining parsley.

Nonna used to serve *polenta con seppie* (polenta with cuttlefish), a traditional Triestine dish, as a savoury main course. Which topping you use to cover the rich yellow porridge also varies depending on whether you live in the mountains – where you will use heartier, meatier sauces – or on the coast (seafood).

Here, I have included a recipe for a king prawn and fennel stew. I've also included Parmesan. Eating cheese with seafood is, of course, controversial in Italy, but I eat Parmesan with just about everything *Italiano* (and just about everything in general). Leave it out if it offends you.

The recipe involves frying diced pancetta, removing it and putting it back in at the end. Cooking in its fat adds a nice richness and taking the pancetta out ensures it stays crispy, adding extra texture.

I can't say it's as good as Nonna's – but nothing could be. **FT**

Niki Blasina is deputy editor of FT Globetrotter



Polenta

- 50ml water
- 120g polenta
- 20g butter, divided
- 120g Parmesan

1 — Bring the water to the boil in a non-stick pan. Reduce the heat to medium and the water to a simmer.

2 — Add the polenta slowly and steadily, while stirring constantly.

3 — Continue to stir. Reduce heat to medium-low once water is soaked up (within 15-30 seconds). Season.

4 — Stir constantly while the polenta thickens and cooks (about 30 minutes or depending on box instructions).

5 — Stir in the butter and Parmesan.

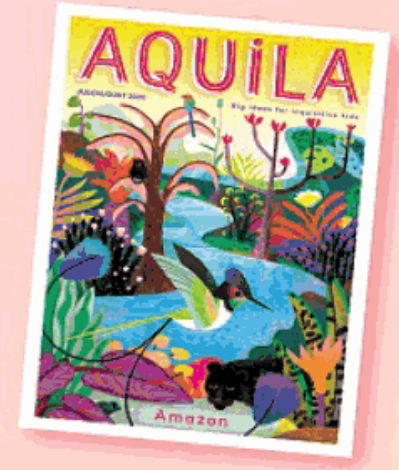


EXTRA ONLINE RECIPE
To follow Niki Blasina's recipe for creamy mushroom ragù, visit ft.com/ragu

AQUILA CHILDREN'S MAGAZINE

Exploring the Amazon

In this Special Summer Double-issue of AQUILA, children can trek through the rainforests, discovering rare plants and creatures along the way. They will meet the indigenous tribes who hide from the western world and find out why this beautiful, mysterious place is so important to us all.



There's a creature in the Amazon river with such a strange reputation it's hard to separate the real from the magical!

Pink River Dolphins are believed by many Amazon folk to be sacred and magical creatures. Legend has it that they carry careless swimmers away to a magical underwater city called **Encante**; a better, richer and more peaceful place - although sadly you can never return home. When night-time falls, these animals turn into beautiful men who love parties and music, but there is a catch (excuse the fishy pun). The only part of their body that can't be disguised is the blowhole on top of their heads. So what do they do? They do what any self-respecting party boy does. They cover it up with a fetching and stylish hat, of course!

For a very long time, the dolphins, known to local people as **Botos** may have been protected from being hunted for food by their legendary powers, and in taking care of the pink river dolphin, humans have perhaps protected the river as well?

AQUILA Facts: Due to hydroelectric dams, deforestation and small-scale gold mining, it is hard to know how many of these extraordinary creatures are left. The IUCN has classified them as vulnerable, but their continuing presence in the river is considered a sign that the ecological system is in good health.

Words by **Frances Durkin**. Illustrated by **Kaley McKean**

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Jancis Robinson Wine

A 'miracle' for Bordeaux

Mathieu Chadronnier runs CVBG, one of the most important Bordeaux wine merchants. He measures his words carefully, often with long pauses before answers. He is not given to hyperbole. But when I asked him at the end of last month how he felt this year's en primeur campaign had gone, he said immediately: "It's a miracle! Honestly, we are so fortunate in this worldwide recession to be in the fine wine business and to have had such a successful campaign. We should all appreciate this because we are the lucky ones."

Some background. Every spring the Bordeaux wine trade invites thousands of wine merchants and media to taste cask samples of the previous year's vintage, hoping that their reactions and scores respectively will help them sell the wines en primeur, when their prices are individually released over a few weeks in early summer.

Thanks to relentlessly rising release prices and the plethora of increasingly exciting alternatives, there were signs that the world's wine drinkers were becoming increasingly disillusioned with Bordeaux in general and buying en primeur in particular, as it no longer seemed to make economic sense. It was often possible to buy a more mature vintage at the same price as the embryonic, yet-to-be-bottled one.

At a big meeting of the Union des Grands Crus (UGC) on March 11, less than three weeks before the en primeur tastings in Bordeaux were scheduled to start, the key château proprietors decided to go ahead with the campaign, to the surprise of many outside Bordeaux. Two days later, President Emmanuel Macron locked down France and the UGC realised that tastings and the like would have to be postponed. That the south-west of France was relatively unscathed by Covid-19 must have played a part in making the Bordelais seem



As imagined by Leon Edler

out of touch. Most of the UK fine wine trade, habitual critics of their counterparts in Bordeaux, lobbied to have the en primeur campaign delayed for months. Encouraged by the promise of *déconfinement* in France from May 11, the UGC tried to hold a tasting in London in June but were unable to persuade its UK events organiser it would be safe.

In the end, the campaign was launched on May 28 without the

usual mass tastings, but with a dramatic 32 per cent decrease on 2018 in the price of the first release, Pontet-Canet 2019. It had yet to be scored but, like many other baby 2019 bordeaux, found eager buyers, including some new to primeur.

It has to be said that the châteaux can decide how much wine to release at this early stage and clearly many of them released far from the full amount – to the chagrin

of those selling the most popular wines. But the key thing was that there were price reductions across the board for the first time in recent memory. Ronan Laborde of Ch Clinet in Pomerol, the long-suffering president of the UGC, tells me by phone that never in his 17 years in the Bordeaux wine business has he known such widespread price reductions, averaging 20 to 25 per cent less than 2018 prices across the board. Wines such as Angélus, Pavie and Gruaud Larose released with only a modest reduction did not sell well.

Vintage quality? Ah yes, that. I have not tasted the wines because I did not like the idea of cask samples being shipped by courier,

'The pandemic provided the Bordelais with an excuse to lower prices without losing face'

possibly in high temperatures, but those who have, including my fellow Master of Wine, Bordeaux resident James Lawther, who valiantly toured the châteaux tasting on behalf of my website, are extremely impressed by the 2019 vintage. As Laborde put it: "We knew from October it was a great vintage. The producers could have said so then, but we've said it so many times."

Perhaps the most important thing about the pandemic for the Bordelais is that it provided them with an excuse to lower prices, even for a great vintage, without losing face. And consumers lapped it up. The relevant thread on my site was ablaze as Nick Martin of Wine Owners supplied graphs showing how each new price compared with that of previous vintages and whether, in view of the commentators' scores on which the trade now depends, the day's releases were decent value. ►



Bordeaux 2019s that were particularly successful en primeur

The 10 bestsellers from two significant London merchants in terms of volume sold in descending order. Their release prices are per dozen bottles in bond, some of which have already risen. Many of these allocations are already sold out.

According to BI Wines

- Lynch-Bages £790
- Figeac £1,512
- Pontet-Canet £732
- Mouton £3,588
- Lafite £5,148
- Cheval Blanc £4,500
- Grand-Puy-Lacoste £540
- Léoville Poyferré £616
- Pichon Baron £1,300
- Palmer £1,998

According to Farr Vintners

- Grand-Puy-Lacoste £540
- Batailley £336
- Lynch-Bages £790
- Pontet-Canet £732
- Montlandrie £158
- Cruzelles £195
- Canon £876
- Langoa Barton £354
- Léoville Poyferré £616
- Léoville Barton £648



Tasting notes on JancisRobinson.com.
International availability from Wine-searcher.com

◀ As the last prices trickled out towards the end of June, Martin observed: "What's been fascinating is the response to the vintage at an emotional level... as providing a sense of comforting normality and engendering optimism for the future, as buyers look ahead two years hence to when the wines arrive at their bonded storage accounts."

It is probably also important that the wines were not released until there were signs that lockdown was ending and some confidence had returned. Laborde said: "We were all happy to survive, full of energy and euphoria." Unusually, the campaign was compressed into two and a half busy weeks (as opposed to three months sometimes) with, for once, releases carefully scheduled and announced in advance so merchants could prepare their offers, even if they didn't know the prices until early on the day of release.

Another factor that helped the campaign was that, due to lockdown, potential buyers had more time than usual and tended to be glued to their screens, via which all the offers were made. The primeur campaign offered an opportunity to play the market, with some deliciousness guaranteed eventually. This was

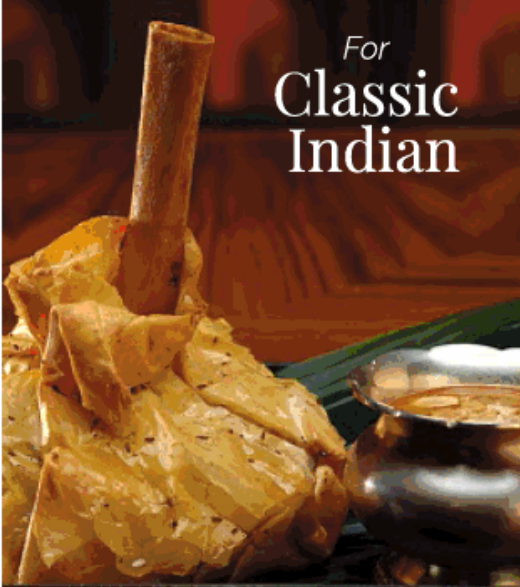
the online en primeur campaign, as Chadronnier acknowledged.

It was helped, he believes, by the fact that meals and the wine served with them assumed such significance during lockdown.

He says the wines sold particularly well in the UK, Germany and Switzerland, and he was surprised by demand from the US, despite a 25 per cent tariff on European wine imports imposed last October. Further incentives have included an easing of payment terms. The negociants and proprietors are often at loggerheads about who bears the cost of what but Laborde observed this year "a real esprit de corps. It's like a war and people forget their small disagreements." Gary Boom of BI Wines is more prosaic: "The negociants are delighted this year because they don't have to sit on overpriced stock."

The sizeable portion of the crop not offered en primeur will trickle on to the market eventually, doubtless at much higher prices, pleasing everyone, especially those who, against all expectations, bought at last month's relatively bargain prices. Bordeaux is back! 

More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson



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FT Weekend



Games



A Round on the Links by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. Furuncle is another name for what kind of skin infection?
2. Who was the British prime minister between 1841 and 1846?
3. Who are the only girl group to have won the British version of *The X Factor* (above)?
4. Who did Winston Churchill (right) replace on British £5 notes in 2016?

5. Betty Rizzo is the leader of the Pink Ladies in which film musical?
6. Between 1987 and 1993 the TV adverts for which product took the form of a serialised romance – and proved so popular that they led to a novelisation of the story?
7. Craps is a gambling game played with what?
8. Who holds the record for most Test runs scored by an English cricketer?

9. What was the first man-made object to break the sound barrier?
10. Claudio, Angelo, Isabella and Mariana are characters in which Shakespeare play?



The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+



= ?

Answers page 10

The Crossword No 496. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1 Stoop (6)
- 4 Pretentious, contrived (8)
- 9 Javelin (5)
- 10 Pierce (9)
- 11 Abandoned (7)
- 12 Southern US state (7)
- 13 Natural fibre (4)
- 14 Fire-retardant substance (8)
- 17 Impudence, gall (8)
- 19 Celebrity (4)
- 22 Small wind instrument (7)
- 24 Word-for-word (7)
- 25 In a salubrious way (9)
- 26 Object (5)
- 27 Memory jogger (8)
- 28 Breathe with difficulty (6)

DOWN

- 1 Dejected about sad town that's dilapidated (4, 4)
- 2 Go too far with hilarious event after spells of cricket (9)
- 3 Red rice is cooked on empty stove (6)
- 5 Basically mean somehow to match investment, at first (13)
- 6 Passage from tax certificate that's abridged and amended (7)
- 7 Creativity's on the ascendant, including first-class jewellery (5)
- 8 Perceived smart outfit for musical entertainer (6)
- 10 Remove vehicles from trains with speed that is changing (13)

- 15 Primarily sad in nature that's turning gloomy (9)
- 16 Opening words of lecture, initially, Old English group rearranged (8)
- 18 Wet mist one found swirling (7)
- 20 Republicans find in this place tailless rodent (6)
- 21 Something for a wound and a runner's pain (6)
- 23 Get shock from electrical armature (5)

Solution to Crossword No 495





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

London vs New York: a Covid-19 culture shock



Last weekend I made a journey that I used to consider utterly commonplace in happier, pre-Covid times – but that now seems momentous. With one teenage daughter in tow, I boarded a plane in New York (where I live) and flew to London, to see my other daughter.

To my relief, travel was far easier than I expected: the airports were empty, the plane half-full and the airline staff kindly provided a gigantic gin and tonic, which I guzzled with a straw while wearing the mandatory face mask.

What I did not expect was to be hit with a subtle but striking form of culture shock on arrival in London. In New York, face masks are now an embedded – and embodied – part of life. Street signs declare “OUTSIDE WITH NO MASK? FUGGEDABOUTT!” Buildings carry more polite notices warning that anyone without a mask is banned. And even without such strictures, almost everyone I see on the streets in my corner of Manhattan has their face covered. Strangers sometimes yell at people who do not.

Indeed, there is such a strong sense of social pressure that in recent months I have worn a mask even when cycling, virtually alone, along Manhattan’s East river. And my daughter has taken to shopping online for “fashion masks” (not least because her school has told her that mask-wearing will be mandatory when they return to class, and she wants to look cool).

Not so in London. A new report issued by the Royal Society and the British Academy shows that, at the end of April, just 25 per cent of Brits wore face masks in public places compared with 66 per cent of Americans. We saw this for ourselves: in London, we appeared to be almost the only people wearing masks on the streets or in shops; even on public transport (where they are supposedly mandatory) some seem to eschew them.

What was equally striking was the contrast in body language. In New York, it has become almost instinctive for people to stand six feet apart. In London, the “instinctive” gap seemed far less.

As a result, when my daughter and I naturally recoiled from people on the street with our New York habits (and masks), we got dirty looks. Maybe Londoners interpreted our behaviour as a sign that we considered ourselves to be infectious. (We know we are not, since we had Covid-19 tests in New York, before departure, and in London, on arrival – and discovered in the process that testing is child’s play to arrange in Manhattan but nightmarishly difficult and costly in London.)

Don’t get me wrong: I am not necessarily arguing that New York has been stricter than London in its overall Covid-19 policy, let alone making any judgments about the US as a whole. Other parts of the US have been extremely lax (which is one reason the infection rate is surging in the south).

Indeed, after talking with London friends, it seems they may have been more rigorous than

New Yorkers in other respects. My New York friends have been taking socially distanced walks with each other throughout the crisis; my London ones have not, until recently.

A study by the Institute of Labor Economics in Germany showed that, while many in the US have continued to order take-away throughout the pandemic, Brits are now less likely to do so than they were before it began. And many London friends tell me that they have been rigorous about disinfecting any cardboard packages that come into their homes (or even quarantining them);

‘In New York, it has become instinctive for people to stand six feet apart. In London, the “instinctive” gap seemed far less’

this is not the case for most New Yorkers I know. So it’s hard to judge, anecdotally, which city has been more “safe”.

But, if nothing else, these subtle differences reveal three key points. The first is the degree to which this crisis has caused us all to define normality according to what we see directly around us. It is not just our physical horizons that have shrunk; for many of us, our mental ones have narrowed too.

Second, it has shown how malleable our ideas of “normality” can be. Three months ago, I presumed that mask-wearing would only be considered “normal” in collectivist cultures such as Japan or Singapore. Now abrasive, individualistic New Yorkers have embraced it too, to a striking degree.

And from these two points there is a third crucial lesson: if government officials want to keep fighting the pandemic, they must pay close attention to these subtle, embodied behavioural patterns and devise public health policies that chime with them. In the case of New York, for example, I suspect that the real benefit of a face mask policy is that masks not only prevent the exhalation of the virus – but also act as a constant reminder that we cannot let our guard down. They are a symbol and reminder of civic responsibility.

Others may disagree. Either way, the key point is one illustrated powerfully by the anthropologist Simon Roberts in a timely new book, *The Power of Not Thinking*: “embodied” habits matter deeply, even if we rarely notice our familiar ones – unless we travel. After a few days in London, I have started to “forget” my mask when I venture outside. When I return to New York, I will have to relearn my habits all over again. **FT**

gillian.tett@ft.com; **@gilliantett**

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